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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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18 October 2011

Iraq: Leaders' Uneasy Relationships, Divergent Goals Hinder Governance

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18 October 2011 (b)(1) (b)(3)

Iraqi political progress remains heavily dependent on the relationships between key leaders because of institutional weakness and a culture that emphasizes personal bonds (b)(1) (b)(3) over politics based on ideology and established processes. Most of Iraq's top leaders have longstanding personal ties, (b)(1) (b)(3) These personal connections and rivalries often deepen power struggles, which will almost certainly distract national leaders from improving governance and political development in Iraq. (b)(3)

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Personalities Driving Politics

Iraqi politics is dominated more by personalities and ethnosectarian interests than by ideological divisions. During government formation talks in 2010, discussions focused largely on the identity of candidates—especially the Prime Minister— (b)(1) (b)(3) rather than on specific policy issues or visions for governance.

- Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law (SOL) coalition and the predominantly Sunni Iraqi National Movement (INM) share an emphasis on Iraqi nationalism and support a broadly secular state. However, the SOL and the INM did not ally after Iraq's national election in March 2010 because of rivalry between their leaders and because Shia leaders wanted to retain the premiership for their sect, (b)(1) (b)(3)

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- Iraqi Sunni parties have few ideological differences; (b)(1) (b)(3) and would probably falter or collapse without that leader. The INM has been plagued by infighting among top leaders since its formation in 2009,

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- Nushirwan Mustafa—a former Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) official who probably aspires to lead the party—resigned from his position as PUK deputy secretary general out of frustration with PUK Secretary General Jalal Talabani's refusal to democratize party decisionmaking, (b)(1) (b)(3) Mustafa formed the Goran (Change) Movement to press for reforms in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. (b)(3)

Rivalries Intensify Power Struggles (b)(3)

The personality-focused nature of Iraqi politics worsens political infighting, including in ethnosectarian groups, political parties, and coalitions. At the national level, Iraqi leaders' personal rivalries reinforce their perception that (b)(3)

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political struggles are zero-sum competitions for power, incentivizing them to lock in gains.

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The ebb and flow of Maliki's relationship with Kurdish Regional Government President Masud Barzani sets the tone for Baghdad-Erbil relations. Barzani's relationship with Maliki cooled in September 2011

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- During government formation in 2010, however, Barzani's improved relationship with Maliki was key to Kurdish leaders' decision to back Maliki for a second term, (b)(1) (b)(3)

- Despite their uneven relationship, both leaders probably recognize that they are the ultimate decisionmakers in Baghad and Erbil and must negotiate. (b)(1) (b)(3)

Common Traits of Top Iraqi Leaders (b)(3)

Iraqi leaders since the fall of the Saddam Husayn regime have a number of common leadership behaviors, driven largely by historical and cultural experiences.[a]

- *Firmly control party.* Many of Iraq's party leaders are legendary figures who tightly control their party and draw on factors such as their family name, religious study, reputation in combat, and resistance to Saddam's regime to legitimize their authority.

- *Seek consensus.* Top party leaders aim to build consensus before acting, a characteristic that helps to counterbalance the effects of their authoritarian tendencies. Iraqi leaders attempt to diffuse responsibility for difficult decisions by gaining consensus in their parties and from other blocs before taking action.

- *Influence security services.* Iraqi leaders try to influence the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and security decisionmaking to promote their political interests and ensure that Iraq's military power is not used against them. Many top Shia and Kurdish leaders who fought against Saddam's regime want their loyalists in the ISF to assuage their fears of a Sunni coup or government-launched attacks, while Sunni

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(b)(1) (b)(3) leaders complain about Shia dominance of the ISF, Maliki has put trusted officials in key security jobs since taking office, (b)(1) (b)(3)

- *Hedge their bets.* Iraqi leaders try to preserve their options by maintaining ties to multiple groups or countries, probably because they perceive their allies are fickle and will let them down. (b)(3)

(b)(3) **Disputes, Personalities Will Hamper Governance, Political Development**

(b)(1) (b)(3) Iraqi leaders' poor relationships will almost certainly impede efforts to improve governance. Personal disputes will continue to distract Iraqi leaders from addressing outstanding issues, such as service provision, and will be linked to discussions about unrelated issues as leaders try to gain concessions from their rivals.

- Iraqi leaders have been unable to agree on a permanent defense minister, in part because neither Allawi nor Maliki is willing to accept a candidate who would oppose their agenda or who is loyal to the other.

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- Sunni and INM leaders, during talks in 2008 about the US-Iraq Security Agreement and in 2011 about a post-2011 US military presence, linked their acceptance of any agreement to power-sharing disputes with Maliki, who they complain fails to include them in decisionmaking.

- Iraqi leaders recognize that their quarrels can interfere with governing. (b)(1) (b)(3)

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The personality focus of Iraqi politics will hinder political development because Iraqi institutions are often shaped by their leaders' ability to assert authority and because many political parties are dominated by an individual or family.

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- Maliki in the past five years has strengthened the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) by exploiting Iraq's legal and constitutional gray areas to broaden his authorities. Council of Representatives (COR) Speaker Usama al-Nujayfi has worked to assert the COR's authority, a shift from its performance under Mahmud al-Mashhadani. (b)(1) (b)(3)

- Families' and individuals' dominance of political parties suggests that these parties stand to lose political clout after their leader fades from the political scene. Adnan al-Dulaymi's Conference of Iraqi People—one of Iraq's four main Sunni parties in the previous COR—has faded into obscurity, largely because Dulaymi is no longer politically engaged and because the party lacked a clear successor.

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In part because of their mistrust of others, the leadership style of Iraqi leaders often results in decisionmaking at the highest levels, which will continue to slow negotiations on key disputes. Political leaders often form committees and send representatives without final decisionmaking authority to negotiate with other blocs. Committees established to resolve entrenched issues—such as constitutional review and the COR committee aimed at resolving disputes about Kirkuk's planned provincial election—have rarely made progress.

- Maliki has used consultative institutions to delay decisions because he recognizes they move slowly.

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Leaders Will Seek US, Regional Support

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Iraqi leaders will almost certainly continue to seek US and regional assistance to bolster their influence and reduce that of their rivals.

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- Kurdish leaders have sought US protection against perceived central government overreach, and Iraqis concerned about the growing power of the PMO have at various times sought US help to improve executive transparency, expand legislative oversight, reintegrate former insurgents, and protect the authorities of the provincial governments, (b)(1) (b)(3)

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At the same time, Iraqi leaders will oppose any US or regional action they perceive gives their rivals the upper hand.

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